

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 3 February, 2002

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

Well, it hasn't been much of a winter so far...but that somehow doesn't have any effect on the fact that it's still the GLOOM TIME (or GRIM TIME, depending on your tradition)...and today (Thursday) bears that out quite adequately, with the predicted ice, snow, slop and whatever the heavens direct our way.

Sometimes, the gloom permeates the heart and enervates the soul...life becomes boring...it's hard to get interested in much of anything...

The following passage from the Book of Sirach (that's one of those books that you only find in the Catholic version of the Old Testament) has always been a favorite of mine at such times:

My son, if you aspire to serve the Lord,
prepare yourself for an ordeal.
Be sincere of heart, be steadfast,
and do not be alarmed when disaster comes.
Cling to him; do not leave him...
Whatever happens to you, accept it...
since gold is tested in the fire,
and chosen men in the furnace of humiliation.
Trust him, and he will uphold you.
Let us fall into the hands of the Lord,
not into the hands of men.
For as his majesty is,
so too is his mercy.

Best wishes in battling the doldrums, whether they be inner or outer.

THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

BLESSING OF THROATS

In honor of the Feast of St. Blaise (3 February), the BLESSING OF THROATS will take place after all the Masses on Sunday, including the WH1715 Mass.

CANDLEMAS DINNER

Come and have dinner next Wednesday at Ike Hall. It's a FREE DINNER for Catholics cadets...with a "Make Your Own Sundae" for dessert.

When: Wednesday, 6 February, 1800

Where: Benny's Lounge, Ike Hall.

Why: Just for the hell of it.
Sign up with your Company Catholic Rep.

IS MARRIAGE IN YOUR FUTURE?

If the answer is "Yes", then please keep in mind the Spring "Pre-Cana" (marriage preparation weekend). "Pre-Cana" is a requirement for any Catholic wedding. It will be held over the weekend of 13-14 April. For more info, please contact us in the Chaplain's Office.

DID YOU KNOW?

BLESSING OF THROATS:

Each year, on the Feast of St. Blais (or close to it), Catholics come to church to have their throats blessed.

The custom is an old one.

According to tradition, Blaise was a Catholic bishop of Sebaste (in Armenia), who was tortured and beheaded by the Roman governor Agricolaus (of Cappadocia and Lesser Armenia) for his Faith in the early-300s. Legend says that he was a physician and that, while in prison, he cured a young boy who was choking from a fishbone lodged in his throat.

Blaise was patron of the throat as early as the 6th century in the Eastern Church and by the 9th century in the Western Church. He became one of the FOURTEEN HOLY HELPERS (see below).

In the Middle Ages, Blaise was a popular figure, and he was thought of whenever anyone had an affliction of the throat. The Church still carries on the tradition.

So, on St. Blaise Day each year (3 February), Catholics pause to pray for physical health. The priest blesses each person with the following words:

Through the prayers of Blaise,
bishop and martyr,
may you be delivered
from every affliction of the throat
and from every other evil.

Blaise is a member of a group of saints who have been looked to for spiritual companionship for a lot of centuries.

The group is called the FOURTEEN HOLY HELPERS, and the tradition is an old one in the Church. It is especially prominent in Germany.

They are 14 saints, invoked for help in various situations. Their collective feast-day is 8 August, and they are as follows:

- St. Denis of Paris - invoked against headaches and rabies.
- St. Erasmus (or "Elmo") - invoked against colic and cramps.
- St. Blaise - invoked against throat disease.
- St. Barbara - invoked against lightening, fire, explosion and sudden death.

St. Margaret - invoked against possession and also by pregnant women.
St. Catherine of Alexandria - invoked by philosophers and students.
St. George - invoked by soldiers.
St. Achatius and Eustace - invoked by hunters.
St. Pantaleon - invoked against tuberculosis.
St. Giles - invoked against epilepsy, insanity and sterility.
St. Cyriac - invoked against demonic possession.
St. Vitus - invoked against the disease called "St. Vitus Dance".
St. Christopher - invoked by travelers.

If you were to look up the story of each saint, you'd find that they all had some colorful reason for being associated with their individual situations or maladies...and for that reason, people in the Middle Ages thought that their help was especially effective in those circumstances.

The earliest pictorial witness to this devotion to the FOURTEEN HOLY HELPERS is a fresco in the Dominican Church in Regensburg, dating from around 1320, and the devotion developed quickly in Nuremberg in the 14th and 15th centuries. It later spread throughout southern Germany and the German-speaking Alps, then into central Germany from Bamberg.

Veneration reached its highest point in the mid-15th century with the pilgrimage to *Vierzehnheiligen* on the upper Main River in the diocese of Bamberg. *Vierzehnheiligen* became the center of this devotion because of a reported vision of a shepherd's son around 1445.

It seems that in his vision, the boy saw a group of 14 children with the Child Jesus in their midst. He was told that these were the FOURTEEN HOLY HELPERS. A chapel was built on the site but was later destroyed in the Peasants' War of 1525. It was replaced on a larger scale in 1543. The present basilica there was built in the 1750s and '60s and is one of the most important of 18th-century German churches.

Vierzehnheiligen still remains one of the most popular pilgrimage centers of the dioceses of Bamberg and Würzburg.

In Christian art, the HOLY HELPERS are depicted in a circle, surrounding the Madonna and Child or often around Jesus as the "Man of Sorrows".

AND JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT YOU'D SEEN EVERYTHING:

Saturday (2 February) is "Groundhog Day", and you probably already know the alleged role of the little rodent in predicting the weather.

For you groundhog watchers (and you Latin scholars), the following couplet from the Middle Ages presents another method of forecasting:

*Si sol splendescat Maria purificante,
Maius erit frigus post festum quam fuit ante.*

If the sun should shine on the feast of Mary's Purification,
It will be colder after the feast than before.

The Feast of Mary's Purification (when she went up to the Temple after the birth of Jesus for the Jewish purification ritual) is on 2 February each year.

Why should a rodent get all the limelight?

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

...the grandfather of a cadet ('02), who died during the night.
...all the Catholic cadets who will be on Retreat this coming weekend.
...the Yearlings as they celebrate Yearling Winter Weekend...and all their families and friends who will be traveling to and from West Point.
...all our military brothers and sisters - and their families - throughout the world - especially those in areas of risk.
...all those who have been injured or killed in connection with our presence in Asia.

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, I have a question about salvation...Can we be assured of our salvation? I know Protestants would say a resounding yes, but I have the impression that the Church teaches that we can't really know for sure. Did I get the wrong impression?

A: Some Christians believe that by a simple profession of faith - "I accept Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior", two things are accomplished: their SALVATION is assured AND they will go to heaven..

However, the Catholic tradition believes that SALVATION is too rich a biblical concept to be limited to a three-second statement.

Catholics believe that SALVATION is a PROCESS. It's a "past-present-future" reality, all at the same time.

And it can always be rejected by us humans.

So, if a Catholic is asked the question "Have you been saved?", the best answer to the question is this:

Yes, I've been saved, and I'm currently
working out my salvation in fear and trembling;
and I joyfully anticipate and hope
for the coming of Jesus Christ
at the end of time. Only on that day
will my salvation be complete.

This echoes St. Paul (Philippians 2:12), who said:

...Work out your salvation in fear
and trembling.

You can boil down the Catholic view about SALVATION in this way:

God chose us; we did not choose God.
God's grace (which means "God's life")
is freely offered to everyone. His grace
comes to us through the death and resurrection
of Jesus Christ, and we need to be connected
to that death and resurrection.

This "connection" is made by the preaching and hearing of God's word and by our acceptance through Baptism, which frees us of sin and begins that "connection" between us and God.

So far, so good.
Then what?

Once baptized by water and the Spirit, we begin what Paul called "working out our salvation..." We do this by submitting ourselves to the will of God in everything...for all our lives. We also do it by immersing ourselves in the Holy Eucharist, in which we experience the "self-giving" of Jesus and learn how to make "self-giving" a constant characteristic in our own lives.

So, you're right: Catholics do not think IN TERMS of "assurance" (being "sure" of our SALVATION at any given time). But at the same time, we are "sure" of the one central fact: the world has been "saved" by Christ.

Then we think in terms of "co-operating" with that reality of SALVATION and making it so much a part of our lives that we're transformed by it.

Without the willingness to be transformed, the offer of SALVATION runs into a brick wall in the heart of the person.

So for Catholics, SALVATION has two aspects: God's sure offer AND our willingness to be transformed by that offer over a lifetime.

And that "transformation" is a life-long process by which we allow God's life (grace) to permeate every level of our personalities and change us at the very center of our beings, gradually lifting us out of ourselves and into God (note that we do NOT believe that we can "earn" SALVATION; the whole process is God's work, not ours).

And the process can go on even after death, in our belief. This is what the idea is behind "purgatory" - which is not a place but a part of the PROCESS of transformation.

Then, when the cosmic PROCESS is complete...

But let's allow St. Paul to say it in his own words:

For just as in Adam all die,
so too in Christ shall all be brought to life,
but each one in proper order:
Christ the firstfruits; then, at his coming,
those who belong to Christ.
Then comes the end, when Christ hands over
the Kingdom to his God and Father...
When everything is subjected to Christ,
then the Son himself will be subjected
to the One who subjected everything to him...
so that God will be all in all.

I Corinthians 15:22-28

And that, in a very brief form, is our belief.

Hope this gives you some clarification.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

PATRON SAINTS:

The topic of PATRON SAINTS or just SAINTS in general has been a source of considerable friction between Catholics and Protestants over the years (although why people feel they need to get all bent out of shape about other people's beliefs is beyond me), so there's a value in presenting exactly what Catholics believe when they talk about PATRON SAINTS.

In Catholic practice, the idea of a PATRON SAINT has had a very strong presence in our Faith over the centuries.

At Baptism, most of us received a saint's name; churches (even an occasional Protestant church, too) and schools are named for saints; in the Army, the different branches have their own patron saints; church organizations have the names of saints attached to them; different occupations look to different saints as their "patron", and even in sickness, different saints are looked to for support and spiritual companionship.

The Catholic tradition remembers St. Paul telling the Corinthians:

Since you aspire to spiritual gifts,
concentrate on those
which will grow to benefit the community.

I Corinthians 14:12

So we believe that the spiritual gifts of those who have gone before us can be a benefit to us here and now. This is part of what we confess in the CREED on Sundays when we say that we believe in the "Communion of Saints".

We're all attached to each other...through the Faith.

So it makes no difference whether we ask our friends on earth to pray for us or our heavenly friends to pray for us. It's all the same belief: we trust in the power of a person's spiritual gifts from Christ to build up the Church and its members.

And that's where the tradition of PATRON SAINTS comes from: a strong awareness in the comfort and power of Christ through the "communion" of believers.

The practice dates from the Early Church.

In the 300s, after the Roman persecutions had ended, Christians were already being named after Apostles and martyrs. Churches began to be named after the SAINTS who had died for the Faith, and the actual buildings were often built over the graves of these martyrs (like St. Peter's in Rome, for example).

In the Middle Ages, every town had its PATRON SAINT, and so did every guild and Church organization. As a matter of fact, most circumstances of life had a protector, and each country had a patron: St. George was thought to protect England, St. Patrick remains the popular protector of Ireland, St. Denis for France.

Generally, the PATRON SAINTS had some relation to the theme, events or circumstance entrusted to him or her: for example, farm animals and pets were always blessed on St. Francis' Day because the stories about St. Francis depict him as being loved by animals - a comment on his gentleness.

Soldiers, especially Catholic ones, have always venerated certain saints as PATRONS of specific branches of soldiery: for example, St. Luke is the PATRON of the Medical Corps (and physicians in general) because he was a physician; St. Matthew is venerated by Finance because he was a tax-collector.

In many cases, the reasons for a particular PATRON SAINT are based on legends...and in some cases people have "gone overboard" with their devotion (but that's what makes us "human")...

Still, the simple idea behind our belief in the "Communion of Saints" is that we can rely on each other to share God's strength and consolation in our needs, and this is true whether we are "in the body" or "out of the body".

After all, God comes to us through other people.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

"We do not see things as THEY are;
we see things as WE are."

The Talmud

And that's the way it is, a day like all days, filled with those events that alter and illuminate our time...

and YOU ARE THERE!!

Hang in there!!

Yearlings, have a GREAT weekend.

And that goes for everyone else, too.

Best wishes.

Woodie